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SUBJECT: A/S FRIED'S MEETING WITH GEORGIAN FM BEZHUASHVILI
ON NOVEMBER 29 AT THE OSCE MINISTERIAL IN MADRID

Classified By: Acting A/S Kurt Volker for Reasons 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (S) Summary: A/S Fried urged Georgia not to restrict its democratic space and to re-establish unrestricted freedom of the media. Bezhuaashvili responded that Prime Minister Gurgenidze was involved in intensive negotiations with News Corp to re-open the Imedi TV station as soon as possible. On CFE and Russia's remaining Istanbul commitment with respect to the Gudauta military base, Bezhuaashvili indicated Georgia could not agree to a compromise that would legitimize a Russian peacekeeping presence in Abkhazia, but stood by the position that Georgia would ratify the Adapted CFE Treaty on the basis of documentary transfer of Gudauta from Russia to Georgia, although this would be politically difficult. After the Georgian elections the Georgian side would work with the U.S. further "to try to salvage the A/CFE treaty." On South Ossetia, Bezhuaashvili indicated Ossetian opposition to the Tbilisi-backed Sanakoyev administration was coordinated with Russia. End summary.

¶2. (U) U.S. participants included A/S Daniel Fried, Congressman Alcee Hastings (D-FL), DAS Matthew Bryza, EUR/RPM Jennifer Laurendeau, EUR/CARC Mike Carpenter (notetaker). Georgian participants included FM Gela Bezhuaashvili, Permanent Representative to the OSCE Ambassador Viktor Dolidze, and an MOD representative.

Democracy in Georgia

¶3. (SBU) A/S Fried noted Georgia had recently been through a difficult period and the U.S. did not want to see it backslide on its transition to democracy. In its relations with the West, Georgia would have to behave like a democracy if it wanted to be treated like one. The USG has a strong interest in seeing Georgia get back on the reform trajectory because of its strategic interest in Georgia's democratic future. Bezhuaashvili noted that Georgia wanted free and fair elections on January 5 and would ask for election monitors from as many countries and organizations as possible. He said there were 22 announced presidential candidates who now needed to collect 50,000 signatures by December 5 to qualify for the ballot. (Note: As of December 3, there were 19 eligible candidates running.)

¶4. (S) A/S Fried opened the CFE discussion by thanking Bezuashvili for his flexibility on a Gudauta solution. This had been critical in enabling Fried to go back to the Russians with a serious proposal, and Georgia's flexibility had been welcomed by NATO Allies. If the U.S. effort to resolve differences over CFE failed, Fried did not want it to be because of Georgia and Moldova. Russia should get the full blame for insisting on reopening key elements of the Treaty.

¶5. (C) Fried recounted his discussion November 26 with Russian DFM Kislyak on CFE: Kislyak had nothing positive to say about the U.S. package proposal, other than to welcome its delivery. Kislyak complained about the reference to fulfillment of remaining commitments on Moldova which appears in the draft Georgian statement suggested by the U.S., and asserted that the current U.S. package was a step backward from what we had offered at the 2 plus 2 meeting because we had withdrawn the idea that Georgia would transfer some elements of Gudauta to Russia for its use.

¶6. (C) Bezuashvili stood by his previous commitment to Fried that Georgia would ratify adapted CFE on the basis of documentary transfer of the Gudauta base from Russia to Georgia, but only just. He indicated that Georgia did not like the U.S. idea for three statements because the U.S. statement appeared to acknowledge the Russian presence. Discussion of the statements continued when Fried was briefly called away from the meeting. EUR/RPM Deputy Director Jennifer Laurendeau reminded Bezuashvili that the idea behind the U.S. statement was to gain for Georgia a degree of transparency regarding Russian forces in at Gudauta that would otherwise be unobtainable. We had understood that Georgia was concerned about how Russia would use the base; transparency was the best (and likely only) way to address that concern in current conditions. The U.S. was not suggesting Georgia directly acknowledge the Russian presence at Gudauta; the U.S. recognized that as a Georgian redline; the U.S. statement would be the vehicle for putting the transparency in place. She noted that Kislyak had reiterated Russia's proposal for transparency via UNOMIG visits; the U.S. had refused that as insufficient. A Georgian MOD representative said sharply that even setting aside the statements, Georgia did not like the modalities the U.S. had proposed for the transparency visits, because by establishing limits on the Russian presence, the modalities admitted its existence. Laurendeau acknowledged that indeed Georgia had a choice to make. It could ratify Adapted CFE with no more transparency regarding the facility than it had today, or it could push for more.

¶7. (C) Upon A/S Fried's return to the meeting, he reinforced the message that Georgia had to make a choice on Gudauta. Fried said that in his conversations on with the Georgian President, Saakashvili had been keen on gaining limits and information on Russian activities at the facility.

The U.S. ideas on transparency were intended to try to obtain some of what the President sought. Georgia should think hard before giving up this opportunity. Bezuashvili acknowledged Fried's point, but repeated the concern that the draft U.S. statement, and the transparency modalities we had suggested, appeared to acknowledge the Russian presence. He believed the way forward was to decouple the issue of the Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia from CFE; this was why Georgia was willing to go ahead with ratification. He said that prior to the Georgian elections it would be next to impossible to move forward on compromises on Gudauta that might appear to sanction a Russian peacekeeping presence in Abkhazia. He noted Georgia was ready to cooperate and strengthen the U.S. negotiating position because it too wanted to keep the CFE regime alive through eventual ratification of the A/CFE treaty, but that discussion of possible compromises would have to wait until after January 15. Bezuashvili claimed it was only a matter of time before

Georgia invoked the 1993 Sochi Agreement to tell the Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia to leave.

Putting Imedi TV Back on the Air

¶ 8. (SBU) Helsinki Commission Chairman and U.S. Congressman Alcee Hastings (D-FL) told Bezhuaashvili he stood ready to organize an OSCE Parliamentary Assembly monitoring team for the January elections. Hastings cautioned, however, that monitoring would get off to a very bad start if Imedi TV were not back on the air when the monitors arrived. Hastings also noted this issue was particularly important for Georgia's friends in the U.S. Congress. Bezhuaashvili replied that Imedi will be reopened; the only question is when. Bezhuaashvili noted PM Gurgenidze was meeting with News Corp and Imedi management every day on this issue.

¶ 9. (C) DAS Bryza told Bezhuaashvili he was also in regular contact with News Corp Vice President Martin Pompadour, and was aware some people within News Corp management were ready to abandon the negotiations because they felt the Georgian side was being unreasonable. Bryza warned Bezhuaashvili that Georgia needed to decouple the issue of business tycoon Badri Patarkatsishvili's ownership and control of Imedi from the issue of re-opening the TV station. A/S Fried underscored this point, telling Bezhuaashvili that the Imedi issue needed to be resolved as a matter of national security and rhetorically asked whether Georgia could afford to wage a two-front war. Bezhuaashvili agreed on the importance of re-opening Imedi and said he wanted to invite media monitors to Georgia in advance of the elections to certify that all candidates received equal access to the electronic media during the campaign. He opined that in the longer term there was a need for developing media self-regulatory mechanisms.

South Ossetia

¶ 10. (C) DAS Bryza told Bezhuaashvili he had made strong statements in support of the demilitarization of South Ossetia during the discussions of the draft OSCE ministerial statement on Georgia. Bryza noted the question of establishing a checkpoint at Didi Gupta (key transit point for illegal weapons and armed personnel) was a decision for the OSCE to make, and not the JCC (a negotiating framework that includes North and South Ossetian, Russian, and Georgian representatives). Thus, the South Ossetians did not have a veto over the establishment of this checkpoint. Bryza also noted the most serious bone of contention during the discussions of Georgia concerned a reference in the draft ministerial statement to taking account of the opinions of "all communities within South Ossetia," which the Russians categorically opposed on the grounds that it obliquely referred to the Tbilisi-backed Sanakoyev administration in Kurta. Bryza told Bezhuaashvili the U.S. had publicly challenged this position by noting there was no reason why the Moscow-backed Kokoity regime should be treated as any more legitimate than the Sanakoyev administration. Bezhuaashvili responded that the South Ossetians tended to have neuralgic reactions to any mention of Sanakoyev.

¶ 11. (C) As proof of Russian influence over the South Ossetian authorities and their negotiating positions, Bezhuaashvili handed around a document from the Russian MFA to the South Ossetian de facto foreign minister with detailed instructions on how to manage various issues. Bezhuaashvili mentioned he would complain directly to Russian FM Lavrov about this interference by Russia in the internal affairs of Georgia.

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